

REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN
Rainbow PUSH Coalition and Education Fund
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It is great to be here with Reverend Jackson. He hosted a powerful media ownership hearing in Chicago where seething concerns about the state of the media boiled to the surface.

The FCC has a sad history when it comes to its treatment of women and minorities in broadcasting. As Dorothy Leavell, publisher of the Chicago Crusader and one of our panelists at the Chicago media ownership, said: “We’re not on a level playing field. We aren’t even in the same ball park!” The FCC itself has acknowledged that, as a result of our early system of awarding broadcast licenses, no persons of color won a competitive hearing until 1975. The state of female and minority ownership hasn’t gotten much better since then. In fact, the FCC doesn’t even have good data on the number of female and people of color who own broadcast stations. Frankly, that’s just appalling.

The numbers compiled by outside experts are troubling. People of color (one-third of U.S. population) own 3.26 percent of TV stations and 7.7 percent of full power commercial radio stations, while women (over half of U.S. population) own 4.97 percent TV stations and 6 percent of full-power commercial radio stations.

Today, I feel a sense of responsibility to remedy this legacy of neglect. Diversity is truly the strength of America, and we need to draw on every community we have.

That’s why I’ve asked the Chairman and my colleagues to create an independent, bipartisan panel – that’s outside of the control of the FCC – to address the crisis of diversity. The need for this panel has been endorsed by House Judiciary Chairman John Conyers, Senator Menendez, Congresswoman Solis, Rainbow PUSH, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Free Press and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. We need this panel to help put this sad past behind us. It is needed to conduct a thorough review of over 40 regulatory proposals that have been collecting dust at the FCC, some as far back as 1992, and recommend an immediate action agenda. Fifteen years is long enough – justice deferred is justice denied.

I am encouraged that the Chairman will join me in creating this independent panel, which would represent the interest of all stakeholders – broadcasters, including minority and female broadcasters, investors, advertisers, and public interest groups. We need to act quickly on this. There is no need to delay. Three weeks have already slipped by since I’ve called on us to act. We’ve had fifteen years to deal with this, including four years since the Court asked us to go back to the drawing board, so we’ve had plenty of time to address these ownership issues first. So it is not right to say we do not have time to do this now, we need to proceed on the broader rules first, since this fundamental issue of fairness has already been so horribly delayed already and swept under the rug. If we want to proceed quickly, we need to move on this quickly first.

We would be honored to have the embodiment of the past and present civil right movement – Reverend Jesse Jackson – on the panel. Reverend Jackson’s spiritual and political leadership will remind us that diversity in media is not only a legal obligation – but a moral one. He will remind us of the direct connection between the fight for civil rights and the fight for economic empowerment in the 21st Century.

I applaud Chairman Martin’s statement today about the need to improve our leased access regime. In fact, opening a proceeding on this in the first place was done at my request in the context of the Adelphia transaction. *See* http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-06-105A4.pdf. I believe that leased access can make a real difference, the current system is broken, and I look forward to working with the Chairman and all of my colleagues to make the regime more workable for independent programmers, including people of color and women. *See* http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-07-18A3.pdf.

The fundamental issue we are here to discuss is media ownership. It is not enough to simply work the land. It’s more important to own the land. Media sharecropping is not a viable alternative to ownership. A comprehensive answer to the dearth of female and people of color ownership cannot wait any longer. Before we act on the media ownership rules, we need to implement the recommendations of our independent panel. It’s not enough to get a report, or issue a notice. We need to implement policies that will address this crisis before we act on any rules to further consolidate the media, which can only take media outlets further out of the reach of women and people of color.

Thank you for inviting me to participate in this timely event about a key civil rights issue of our day.